AI WITHOUT BOSSES

Public Community Syllabus

Dates: Aug 27 – Dec 10, 2026

NMGM 0208A · CRN 18408

Thursdays, 12:10 PM – 2:00 PM (New York, ET)

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Course Description

As artificial intelligence reshapes societies and economies, who controls its direction—and whose interests does it serve? This course moves beyond legislative fixes to explore practical, within-reach alternatives for developing and governing AI in ways that promote equity and collective well-being.

AI holds genuine promise for supporting local priorities across the majority world—but it can also reinforce inequality and extract resources without consent. AI WITHOUT BOSSES centers grounded, community-based alternatives to the dominant Big Tech model, deliberately expanding beyond the U.S.-focused perspectives that dominate academic and activist tech spaces. We actively work to include majority world voices, even where language barriers, limited internet access, or cultural differences pose challenges.

AI WITHOUT BOSSES is closely connected to the upcoming Solidarity AI Conference in Bangkok this November. Students will engage directly with featured researchers and practitioners, gaining early access to their ideas and joining an international conversation that spans labor, governance, finance, and community development.

This is an interdisciplinary collective learning journey, bringing together students and leading voices from cultural criticism, technical expertise, cooperative practice, sociology, law, political economy, technology studies, ethics, and environmental humanities.

Course Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, participants will:

- Understand the historical and current debates around AI, ownership, and equity.

- Grasp how extractive AI systems entrench global inequalities.
- Examine the role of digital infrastructure in maintaining technopower.
- Analyze cooperative alternatives emerging globally, with case studies from Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and Indigenous contexts.
- Assess AI's impact on labor rights, platform governance, and the solidarity economy.
- Explore alternative AI governance models centered on democratic decision-making.
- Engage with open-source AI tools and cooperative-led digital initiatives.

Who Is This For

This course is for students, cooperative practitioners, labor organizers, technologists, policymakers, artists, cultural workers, and community leaders interested in building more democratic, people-centered alternatives to Big Tech AI.

What You'll Leave With

Participants will leave with critical concepts, shared language, political frameworks, concrete examples, and international connections that can inform their work in technology, organizing, policy, research, education, art, and community development.

- A critical understanding of AI's political economy
- Familiarity with cooperative and solidarity-based alternatives
- Connections to an international network of practitioners and researchers
- Practical examples of democratic AI governance in action
- A framework for evaluating AI beyond profit and efficiency

Workload

The required readings are intentionally brief and manageable at roughly 30 pages per week. Former participants have reported spending anywhere from 1 to 6 hours per week preparing for class, depending on their availability, reading pace, and level of engagement. For those with the time, curiosity, and capacity to go deeper, the suggested readings, films, podcasts, and case studies offer many additional paths for learning.

Remote Learning Guidelines

- Video on during all sessions.
- Join from a laptop or desktop — no cellphones.
- No multitasking; this seminar requires full attention.
- Use a headset when possible to reduce background noise.
- Arrive on time and mute when not speaking.

- Participate actively through voice and/or chat.
- Treat the virtual classroom as you would a physical one.

Policy on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

Generative AI can be a helpful tool for learning but only when used skilfully. Engaging with lectures, readings, and peer perspectives is central to building the critical thinking and analytical skills needed to articulate your ideas in your own voice. When used thoughtfully, AI can function as a conversational partner for feedback helping you test arguments, pose questions, clarify complex ideas, and improve drafts of your writing.

However, you may not submit work that is primarily generated by AI. Submitting AI-written material especially without meaningful revision or critical engagement—is considered academic misconduct. You are responsible for ensuring that all submitted work reflects accuracy, independent thought, and principled academic conduct.

To Receive Your Certificate

Attend at least 12 of the 15 sessions and come prepared to participate. Arriving more than 10 minutes late or leaving more than 15 minutes early counts as an absence. There are no written assignments or grades, though you're welcome to share reflections on Hylo.

Four Participation Pathways

1) Undergraduate Students (The New School)

Undergraduate students follow the undergraduate syllabus and are required to complete graded assignments and papers, with full academic support and feedback from the instructor.

2) Graduate Students (The New School)

Graduate students follow a parallel but more advanced syllabus, with additional readings, graded assignments, papers, and instructor guidance.

3) Community Participants (Synchronous)

Community participants who attend live sessions follow the community syllabus. They are invited to participate in discussions, breakout groups, and collaborative activities. There are no assignments, no grades, and no required written work.

4) Community Participants (Asynchronous)

Community participants who cannot attend live sessions may participate asynchronously by watching recorded class sessions and engaging with course materials on their own schedule. They follow the regular community syllabus; there is no distinct syllabus for asynchronous learners. They will have access to the course platform, discussion spaces, and scheduled instructor office hours, including sessions timed to be accessible for participants in Asia and Southeast Asia. There are no assignments, no grades, no required written work, and no individual written feedback. *Participants in this track have to declare their decision to commit to this track by week 3 of the course, before class.* We cannot provide a certificate for participants in this track.

Readings

We're aiming to broaden the conversation beyond the often U.S.-centered networks of scholars and tech activists, by including a wider range of perspectives—especially from regions commonly referred to as the Global South or majority world. 1–2 required readings or resources per week, totaling not more than 10–30 pages.

Pedagogy

This course follows a participatory, co-learning model inspired by Jacques Rancière's concept of the "Ignorant Schoolmaster," which holds that knowledge emerges collectively through dialogue rather than being delivered from a single authority. For working professionals and community participants, the expected time commitment is approximately 2–4 hours per week, including reading, forum engagement, and participation in either live course activities or asynchronous engagement.

Community Norms

This course is built on mutual respect, curiosity, and trust. Please engage with others kindly, challenge ideas without attacking people, and keep anything shared in class private unless it is clearly intended for wider circulation. Course materials may not be shared beyond the class. We follow the spirit of the Chatham House Rule: participants are free to use and share what they learn, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of any participant may be revealed or linked to particular comments, ideas, or experiences. Participants are encouraged to take responsibility for their own well-being and to step back, take breaks, or seek support when needed.

Course Flow

The course normally meets on Thursdays from 12:10–2:00 PM (New York Time). The following sessions differ from the regular schedule:

Friday, September 11 · 9:00–10:20 AM EDT

Stories from Cooperative Tech Futures — Workshop 1

A public ICDE online event with Max Haiven, Melike Kaplan (ICDE), and Alessandro Longo held at a different time and on a different day. Registration is required.

Friday, September 25 · 9:00–10:50 AM EDT (Optional)

Stories from Cooperative Tech Futures — Workshop 2: Writing Cooperative Futures

Optional public event. Registration is required.

Thursday, November 12

No Class

No synchronous session due to the Solidarity AI Conference in Bangkok (November 12–15).

Thursday, November 26

No Class

Thanksgiving holiday.

COURSE OUTLINE

This course unfolds in four interconnected phases: critique, political responses, building alternatives, and movement building. We begin by examining the power dynamics and systemic harms embedded in contemporary AI—from labor exploitation and bias to environmental degradation and data colonialism.

PART I: UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM (WEEKS 1–7)

Week 1 · Thursday, August 27

Foundations

This opening session orients students to the course structure, digital workspace (Hylo), and discussion norms. After a walkthrough of the syllabus and expectations, students will participate in breakouts to surface perceived harms of AI and begin co-creating a shared glossary of key terms.

Beyond logistics, the session introduces AI as a socio-technical system shaped by political, economic, and infrastructural forces. Through foundational readings—including Kate Crawford's Atlas of AI and a policy reflection from the Digital Watch Observatory—students begin to examine how AI's impacts vary across contexts and why people-centered alternatives are urgently needed.

CLASS DISCUSSION

We reflect on how AI and digital infrastructures operate differently across economic, political, and infrastructural contexts.

REQUIRED READINGS

Crawford, Kate. "Introduction." In *Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021, pp. 1–22.

Digital Watch. "AI That Serves Communities, Not the Other Way Round." *Digital Watch Observatory,* July 10, 2025. https://dig.watch/updates/ai-that-serves-communities-not-the-other-way-round

SUGGESTED READINGS

Monett, D. *A Collection of Books on Topics Strongly Related to Critical AI* (14th ed., 2026). https://monettdiaz.com/books-critical-ai.html

Hao, Karen. "Disaster Capitalism." In *Empire of AI: Dreams and Nightmares in Sam Altman's OpenAI.* New York: Penguin Press, 2025.

O'Neill, Cathy. "Civilian Casualties" and "Ineligible to Serve." In *Weapons of Math Destruction.* New York: Crown, 2016, chapters 5–6.

Week 2 · Thursday, September 3
Unpacking the Myths of AI

This session challenges the myth of AI as a singular, autonomous intelligence. Instead, we frame it as a global infrastructure rooted in resource extraction, labor exploitation, and algorithmic control. Drawing

from Kate Crawford's Atlas of AI, we examine how these systems function across governance, labor, and surveillance—amplifying inequality through racial, cultural, and geographic bias in hiring, policing, healthcare, and border control.

We also explore how AI undermines creative industries through mass copyright infringement and unconsented data use. From Gaza to Ukraine, Sudan, and Myanmar, we trace its militarization and role in reinforcing power. Finally, we confront the limits of regulation, given Big Tech's dominance, weak U.S. oversight, and Europe's failure to enforce existing laws.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

— What are the foundational myths that sustain current AI development—and who do they serve?

— How do algorithmic, cultural, and environmental harms show up in real-world applications of AI?

— Why aren't existing laws enough—and what stands in the way of meaningful regulation?

REQUIRED READINGS

Webb, Amy. "Mind and Machine – A Very Brief History of AI." In *The Big Nine.* New York: PublicAffairs, 2019, chapter 1.

Turner, Fred. "The Texan Ideology: Silicon Valley Looks for Lebensraum in the Bible Belt." *The Baffler,* no. 84, November 2025.

Kerr, Dara. "Trump's DoJ Intervenes to Back Elon Musk in Datacenter Pollution Lawsuit." *The Guardian,* June 16, 2026.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Pope Leo XIV. *Magnifica Humanitas: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence.* Vatican City, 2026. https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/encyclicals/documents/20260515-magnifica-humanitas.html

"Localizing AI in the Global South." *Nature Machine Intelligence* 7 (2025): 675.

Webb, Amy. "The Insular World of AI's Tribes." In *The Big Nine.* New York: PublicAffairs, 2019, chapter 2.

Kinder, Molly. 2024. "Hollywood Writers Went on Strike to Protect Their Livelihoods from Generative AI. Their Remarkable Victory Matters for All Workers." Brookings Institution, April 12, 2024

https://www.brookings.edu/articles/hollywood-writers-went-on-strike-to-protect-their-livelihoods-from-generative-ai/

PODCAST

The Radical AI Podcast. “Episode 8: Love, Challenge, and Hope: Building a Movement to Dismantle the New Jim Code with Ruha Benjamin.” May 6, 2020. https://www.radicalai.org/episode-8-ruha-benjamin

FILM

Buolamwini, Joy. “The Coded Gaze: Bias in Artificial Intelligence.” Bloomberg Equality Summit, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRUEVYndh9c

“Les sacrifiés de l’IA.” *Éducation Physique & Sportive* / PeerTube, published February 11, 2025. Video, 1:13:11.

GUEST SPEAKER Alek Tarkovski

Alek Tarkovski is a leading voice in the public AI movement, working to build AI infrastructure that serves the public interest rather than corporate profit.

Week 3 · Friday, September 11, 9:00–10:20 AM EDT

Stories from Cooperative Tech Futures — Workshop 1

Note: This is a public event at a different time from usual. You must register separately as the Zoom URL is only sent to registered participants.
Learn more

Register

Stories from Cooperative Tech Futures is an ICDE event inspired by Melike Kaplan and Max Haiven’s Worker as Futurist project, inviting participants to reclaim the future through radical imagination grounded in real-world cooperative alternatives.

In Workshop 1, Mapping the Seeds of Tomorrow, participants explore existing initiatives such as platform cooperatives, data cooperatives, feminist tech projects, community-owned digital

infrastructure, and community land trusts, then imagine the technological futures these seeds could grow into beyond Big Tech and extractive capitalism.

Week 4 · Thursday, September 17

Colonialism Reloaded

This session examines how AI is entangled with extractive systems that echo colonial legacies—particularly in the Global South. Through regional critiques, lived experiences, and artistic interventions, we explore how digital technologies intersect with labor, sovereignty, and cultural power. From Kriangsak Teerakowitkajorn's call for new labor imaginaries in Asia to Shav Vimalendiran's analysis of cultural bias in large language models, we begin to see how global inequalities are reproduced in AI systems.

Supplemental materials deepen this inquiry—covering data colonialism (Couldry & Mejias), governance gaps (Gurumurthy & Chami), and regional case studies from Turkey (Genç), South America (Rikap), and the Global South's digital users (Arora). We also explore artistic and geopolitical perspectives, from the Ghana Think Tank's inversion of North-South problem-solving to Timnit Gebru's podcast on AI geopolitics. https://www.ghanathinktank.org/

GUIDING QUESTIONS

— How does AI reinforce or reconfigure existing colonial and extractive power structures?

— What alternative imaginaries or governance models are emerging from the Global South?

— Who benefits—and who is made invisible—when AI systems are deployed globally?

REQUIRED READINGS

Singh, Deepa. "AI Ethics in and for the Global South: Universal Vs. Situated Approaches." *Medium,* March 27, 2025.
https://medium.com/@deepasingh/ai-ethics-in-and-for-the-global-south-universal-vs-situated-approaches-58d3a6b6d07c

SUGGESTED READINGS

Vimalendiran, Shav. "Cultural Bias in LLMs." *Blog,* July 20, 2024.
https://www.howandwhyai.com/blog/cultural-bias-in-llms

Couldry, Nick, and Ulises A. Mejias. “The Coloniality of Data Relations.” In *The Costs of Connection.* Stanford University Press, 2019, chapter 3.

Gurumurthy, Anita, and Nandini Chami. *The Wicked Problem of AI Governance.* New Delhi: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2019. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344604252_The_Wicked_Problem_of_AI_Governance

Genç, Kaya. “Desperate for Work, Translators Train the AI That’s Putting Them Out of Work.” *Rest of World,* February 20, 2025. https://restofworld.org/2025/turkeys-translators-training-ai-replacements/

Rikap, Cecilia. “South America’s Sovereignty Is Being Lost in Big Tech’s Clouds.” *openDemocracy,* July 30, 2025.

Michelle Du and Chinasa T. Okolo, “Reimagining the Future of Data and AI Labor in the Global South,” *Brookings Institution*, October 7, 2025. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/reimagining-the-future-of-data-and-ai-labor-in-the-global-south/

Noopur Raval, “Interrupting Invisibility in a Global World,” Interactions 28, no. 4 (July–August 2021): 27–31. https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3469348

PODCAST

Marx, Paris. “AI Hype Enters Its Geopolitics Era w/ Timnit Gebru.” *Tech Won’t Save Us,* March 13, 2025. https://techwontsave.us/episode/267_ai_hype_enters_its_geopolitics_era_w_timnit_gebru

ART PROJECT

Ghana Think Tank—the collective that flips conventional power dynamics by having think tanks in the Global South tackle problems from the Global North. https://www.ghanathinktank.org/

GUEST SPEAKER Sandeep Mertia

Sandeep Mertia is an Assistant Professor at Stevens Institute of Technology whose work spans the anthropology of computing, data-driven governance, and technology futures, with a particular focus on South Asia and the majority world.

Week 5 · Thursday, September 24

The Environmental Cost of AI

We retrace every stage of AI's material life—lithium and rare-earth extraction, megawatt-hungry data centers, water-cooled GPUs, and the mounting e-waste that follows each model upgrade. Readings from Atlas of AI, Sinem Görüçü's work on humor and meme-making as a way for AI practitioners to critically engage environmental impacts, and up-to-the-minute journalism ground a data-driven audit of energy, water, and mineral inputs for today's leading systems.

We also examine speculative fabulation through an imagined podcast interview set on a North Sea energy island called Atlantis, asking what computing could look like within a community-governed green grid. In breakouts, students apply cooperative principles to draft "eco-manifestos" that set concrete targets for frugality, shared ownership of infrastructure, and transparent impact reporting.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

— What are the full ecological costs of AI, from extraction to e-waste?

— How can cooperative principles reshape the environmental footprint of AI infrastructures?

— What would it take to build truly sustainable, low-carbon AI systems—and who should be responsible for that transition?

REQUIRED READINGS

Hao, Karen. "Plundered Earth." In *Empire of AI: Dreams and Nightmares in Sam Altman's OpenAI.* New York: Penguin Press, 2025.

Bhat, Divsha. "Big Tech Is Building AI in the Desert. The Water May Not Last." *Rest of World,* August 4, 2025. https://restofworld.org/2025/gulf-ai-water-crisis

SUGGESTED READINGS

Görüçü, S. "Meme-tivism: Rethinking AI's Environmental Impact." https://meme-tivism.github.io/

Berreby, David. "As Use of A.I. Soars, So Does the Energy and Water It Requires." *Yale Environment 360,* February 6, 2024. https://e360.yale.edu/features/artificial-intelligence-climate-energy-emissions

Parshley, Lois. “The Hidden Environmental Impact of AI.” *Jacobin,* June 20, 2024. https://jacobin.com/2024/06/ai-data-center-energy-usage-environment/

Nafus, Dawn, and Laura Watts. “Federated Fair Trade Energy: Speculative Fabulation for a Planet with Limits.” *LIMITS ’26,* 2026. https://arxiv.org/pdf/2606.17322

“Water for Data.” *People & Power*, produced by Al Jazeera Media Network, July 3, 2025. Video, 24:40.

Sophia Falk, “More Than Carbon: The Full Environmental Footprint of LLMs,” *LUMEN*, 2025.

GUEST SPEAKER Tara Merk

Tara Merk is an ICDE affiliate researcher whose doctoral work on cooperative data centers examines their governance, scalability, and potential role in supporting cooperative AI as an alternative to corporate-owned infrastructure.

OPTIONAL:

Stories from Cooperative Tech Futures — Workshop 2: Writing Cooperative Futures

Learn more

Register

Friday, September 25, 9:00–10:50 AM EDT (Online). You must register.

Week 6 · Thursday, October 1

AI and the Appropriation of Creative Labor

This session examines how generative AI reshapes creative industries by automating artistic work and training on scraped artistic, literary, and musical works without consent. We focus on authorship, ownership, attribution, compensation, and economic survival, asking how creators can have a real voice in AI governance.

From Studio Ghibli–style image generators to lawsuits by authors, musicians, and visual artists, we explore legal challenges, ethical failures, and frameworks from the World Economic Forum and Brookings Institution. Students conclude by drafting policy memos or fair-compensation proposals that address large-scale intellectual property theft and propose enforceable protections for human creators.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

— To what extent should AI companies be held legally or financially accountable for using copyrighted material without consent, and what models of compensation are viable at scale?

— Is "style" a form of intellectual property that deserves protection in the era of generative AI? How do current laws fall short?

— What would a fair and enforceable system look like for protecting artists, musicians, and writers in a world where their work can be scraped, mimicked, and monetized by machines?

REQUIRED READINGS

Wang, Judy, and Nicol Turner Lee. "AI and the Visual Arts: The Case for Copyright Protection." *Brookings Institution,* April 18, 2025. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/ai-and-the-visual-arts-the-case-for-copyright-protection/

SUGGESTED READINGS

O'Brien, Matt, and Sarah Parvini. "ChatGPT's Viral Studio Ghibli-Style Images Highlight AI Copyright Concerns." *Associated Press,* March 28, 2025.

Lab for AI Ethics & Creative Labor. "F(r)ictions: Creative Work in an Age of AI." *Horizontal TNS2.* https://www.aicreativelabor.com/project/frictions

GUEST SPEAKER Marcelo Vieta

Marcelo Vieta is an Associate Professor at the University of Toronto whose research spans the social and solidarity economy, worker-recuperated enterprises, and new cooperativism, with a particular focus on Latin America, Canada, and Italy.

Week 7 · Thursday, October 8

Automation's Backbone

This session exposes the illusion of autonomous AI by spotlighting the hidden human labor behind it—content moderation, annotation, data labeling, and flagging. Drawing on the myth of the 18th-century Mechanical Turk, a supposed chess-playing machine secretly controlled by a person, we explore how modern AI similarly masks the human effort embedded in its operations.

Despite the image of machine intelligence, today's systems depend on vast, underpaid workforces—often in the Global South—whose contributions are erased from view. Through personal accounts, cooperative alternatives, and critical artworks, we investigate how this invisibility sustains algorithmic injustice and explore pathways toward recognition and accountability.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

— How does the myth of autonomous AI—echoing the Mechanical Turk—serve to obscure the human labor behind machine learning systems?

— What are the ethical and economic consequences of hiding the labor of content moderators, annotators, and data workers, particularly those in the Global South?

— What would it take to make this labor visible, valued, and collectively owned—and how can cooperative models challenge the extractive logics of current AI development?

REQUIRED READINGS

Muldoon, James, Callum Cant, and Mark Graham. "The Annotator." In *Feeding the Machine: The Hidden Human Labor Powering A.I.,* chapter 1. New York: Bloomsbury, 2024.

Smith, Robert, and Alexandra Heal. "Spies, Spinners, Solicitors: Builder.ai's 'Perfectly Normal' Creditor List in Full." *Financial Times,* June 9, 2025. https://www.ft.com/content/16ee837a-1d89-448b-8a33-9741025334d6

SUGGESTED READINGS

Tinn, Honghong. "TSMC and the New Geopolitics of the Twenty-First Century." In *Island Tinkerers.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2025. https://direct.mit.edu/books/oa-monograph/5889/chapter/5265818/TSMC-and-the-New-Geopolitics-of-the-Twenty-First

Gray, Mary L., and Siddharth Suri. "Algorithmic Cruelty" and "Working Hard for [More Than] the Money." In *Ghost Work.* Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019.

Casilli, Antonio A. “Will Humans Replace Robots?” In *Waiting for Robots.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2025, chapter 1.

Crawford, Kate. “Labor.” In *Atlas of AI.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021, chapter 2.

Buolamwini, Joy. “Daughter of Art and Science.” In *Unmasking AI.* New York: Random House, 2023, chapter 1.

Esther Mwema and Abeba Birhane, “Undersea Cables in Africa: The New Frontiers of Digital Colonialism,” *First Monday* 29, no. 4 (April 2024) https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/13219

Nabil Echchaibi, Samira Rajabi, and Nathan Schneider, Sacred Stack: The Art of Cyborg Community (Boulder, CO: Media Economies Design Lab and Center for Media, Religion, and Culture, University of Colorado Boulder; Metalabel, 2023).

GUEST SPEAKER Kenzo Soares

Kenzo Soares Seto is an ICDE Fellow and Resident Fellow at Yale Law School whose research focuses on AI regulation in Latin America, examining how civil society, tech workers, and governments negotiate digital sovereignty, algorithmic justice, and platform economies.

OPTIONAL:
Architectures of Participation

Learn more

Sybille Légitime — Ph.D. Student, Department of Computer Science, Brown University (Data in Society Collective (DISCO) Lab; Center for Technological Responsibility, Reimagination and Redesign)

Yuhan Liu — Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Computer Science (Human–Computer Interaction Lab), Princeton University

Andrés Monroy-Hernández — Associate Professor, Department of Computer Science, Princeton University

Trebor Scholz — Associate Professor, The New School; Founding Director, Platform Cooperativism Consortium (PCC)

Harini Suresh — Assistant Professor, Department of Computer Science, Brown University

Friday, October 9, 9:00–10:50 AM EDT (Online). You must register.

PART II: POLITICAL RESPONSES (WEEKS 8–9)

Week 8 · Thursday, October 15
Regulate, Enforce, Build Worker Power

This session examines how legislation and policy could support a more democratic, people-centered AI ecosystem, one designed not for profit or control, but for public good. At stake is whether laws can meaningfully restrain corporate monopolies and state surveillance, or merely formalize existing inequalities under the banner of "ethics."

We'll look closely at initiatives like the EU AI Act and the U.S. Executive Order on Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy AI, both of which reflect a growing consensus that AI requires guardrails. Yet, as Janet Vertesi, danah boyd, Alex Taylor, and Benjamin Shestakofsky argue, meaningful AI accountability requires examining the political economy of AI: who controls the capital, labor, infrastructure, data, and power that make these systems possible. Against this backdrop, the session asks what structurally aware legislation might look like—laws that do not just manage risk, but redistribute power.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

— What kinds of legislative frameworks could truly enable people-centered AI?

— How do current efforts like the EU AI Act and U.S. Executive Order fall short?

— What are the risks of relying on policy alone in an era of techno-authoritarianism?

REQUIRED READINGS

Vertesi, Janet, danah boyd, Alex Taylor, and Benjamin Shestakofsky. "Reckoning with the Political Economy of AI: Avoiding Decoys in Pursuit of Accountability." *arXiv,* 2026. https://arxiv.org/abs/2604.16106

Benkler, Y. "Practical Anarchism: Peer Mutualism, Market Power, and the Fallible State." *Politics & Society* 41, no. 2 (2013): 213–251. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0032329213483108

Jozak, Tom. *2024 EU AI Act: A Detailed Analysis.* SSRN, March 26, 2025. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5196856

SUGGESTED READINGS

Cuéllar, Mariano-Florentino, and Aziz Z. Huq. *The Democratic Regulation of Artificial Intelligence.* Knight First Amendment Institute, 2022. https://knightcolumbia.org/content/the-democratic-regulation-of-artificial-intelligence

Ramos, Maria Elisabete, et al. "Cooperatives and the Use of Artificial Intelligence: A Critical View." *Sustainability* 15, no. 1 (2023): 329. https://doi.org/10.3390/su15010329

Seth Lazar and Mariano-Florentino Cuéllar, "AI Agents and Democratic Resilience: How AI Agents Might Affect the Realization of Democratic Values," *Knight First Amendment Institute*, September 4, 2025. https://knightcolumbia.org/content/ai-agents-and-democratic-resilience

"Community-Aligned AI Benchmarks." Aspen Digital, 2025–2026. https://www.aspendigital.org/project/ai-benchmarks/

GUEST SPEAKER Dorleta Urrutia Oñate

Dorleta Urrutia Oñate is an ICDE Fellow and professor at Mondragon University whose research explores how AI-driven financing mechanisms and trustworthy governance frameworks can help platform cooperatives scale sustainably without compromising democratic ownership.

Week 9 · Thursday, October 22

Digital Independence

Who controls the digital infrastructure on which our societies increasingly depend? This session examines digital sovereignty in an age when a handful of US-based technology companies dominate operating systems, cloud computing, AI models, and digital communications. Drawing on recent scholarship, we explore how this concentration of power affects autonomy, resilience, and democracy, and why regulation alone is insufficient.

We also consider the rise of AI agents and ask what sovereignty means when systems can act autonomously on our behalf. Through examples ranging from steward-owned and employee-owned enterprises to Indigenous AI initiatives rooted in local languages and cultural values, students will explore alternative models for building digital infrastructures that are accountable to communities rather than investors.

REQUIRED READINGS

Nagappa, A., and D. Angus. "Nearly Everything We Use Online Is Owned by Big Tech. There's a Better Way Forward." *The Conversation,* May 20, 2026. https://theconversation.com/nearly-everything-we-use-online-is-owned-by-big-tech-theres-a-better-way-forward-282969

https://theconversation.com/nearly-everything-we-use-online-is-owned-by-big-tech-theres-a-better-way-forward-282969

Anthropic. "Statement on the US Government Directive to Suspend Access to Fable 5 and Mythos 5." Anthropic Newsroom, June 12, 2026. https://www.anthropic.com/news/fable-mythos-access

Broer, S. M. L. "The 28th Regime as a Pathway for Non-Extractive Business Models." *N-EXTLAW Working Paper Series* No. 5/2026. https://www.nonextractivefuture.eu/publication/the-28th-regime-as-a-pathway-for-non-extractive-business-models-designing-start-ups-the-european-way/

Kuslikis, A., and S. Dudley. "TCUs Positioned to Lead a Community of Indigenous AI Practice." *Tribal College Journal* 37, no. 4 (2026). https://tribalcollegejournal.org/tcus-positioned-to-lead-a-community-of-indigenous-ai-practice

GUEST SPEAKER Phakin Nimmannorrawong

Phakin Nimmannorrawong is an ICDE Fellow and PhD candidate in Sociology at the University of Cambridge researching the intersection of leftist politics and blockchain communities, with a focus on how solidarity-oriented crypto infrastructures are built and contested in practice.

PART III: BUILDING ALTERNATIVES (WEEKS 10–12)

Week 10 · Thursday, October 29

From Cooperative AI to the Solidarity Stack

This session introduces the Solidarity Stack: a vision for AI infrastructure built through alliances among cooperatives, public institutions, unions, climate justice networks, Indigenous data-sovereignty campaigns, and public-interest technology initiatives. Cooperatives alone cannot confront the systemic challenges of AI in isolation. To make a real impact, they must connect with broader movements fighting over labor, climate, ownership, data governance, and democratic control—and reimagine what it would mean for the entire digital stack, from mineral extraction and chip manufacturing to data centers, model training, and governance, to be cooperatively run.

We examine Current AI, Public AI, LaSuite.coop, and other open alternatives to Big Tech, while asking what remains missing when governance is institutional rather than community-owned. Cooperatively owned mines already exist in Peru, Colombia, Zambia, and Mongolia; cooperative data centers have emerged in Germany and the Netherlands. Drawing on the 1880s vision of the cooperative commonwealth and historic U.S. cooperative ecosystems, we explore how solidarity-based infrastructure might be built at every layer of AI's global supply chain. Shared principles such as democratic governance, mutual aid, public accountability, and collective ownership form the basis of a durable, people-centered alternative to extractive AI systems.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

— How do cooperative digital infrastructures—such as member-owned data centers—redefine control, ownership, and accountability compared to corporate platforms?

— What technical and organizational design choices support data sovereignty, democratic governance, and long-term resilience in digital systems?

— Why can't cooperatives alone confront the structural harms of AI—and what does meaningful cross-movement collaboration look like?

REQUIRED READINGS

Scholz, R. Trebor, and Mark Esposito. "Building a Solidarity Ecosystem for AI." *Stanford Social Innovation Review,* February 5, 2026. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/artificial-intelligence-solidarity-ecosystem

Hunt-Hendrix, Leah, and Astra Taylor. "Solidarity Beyond Borders." In *Solidarity: The Past, Present, and Future of a World-Changing Idea.* New York: Pantheon Books, 2024.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Kawano, Emily, and Julie Matthaei. “System Change: A Basic Primer to the Solidarity Economy.” *Nonprofit Quarterly,* July 8, 2020. https://nonprofitquarterly.org/system-change-a-basic-primer-to-the-solidarity-economy/

Sarah Nicole, Samuel Vance-Law, Connor Spelliscy, and Jeb Bell, *How Can Data Cooperatives Help Build a Fair Data Economy? Preliminary Observations and Considerations for Practical Data Governance Solutions* (Project Liberty Institute and Decentralization Research Center, January 2025).

Jean-Louis Laville, “Origins and Histories of the Social and Solidarity Economy,” in *Encyclopedia of the Social and Solidarity Economy*, ed. Ilcheong Yi et al. (Cheltenham, UK, and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing in partnership with the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy, forthcoming 2023).

Zimmermann, Annette. *Democratizing AI.* https://www.democratizing-ai.net/

Public AI. *Public AI Network.* https://publicai.network/

Current AI. “Building Public Interest AI Technology Together.” https://www.currentai.org/

Vieta, Marcelo, et al. “Editorial: The New Cooperativism.” *Affinities* 4, no. 1 (2010): 1–11. https://ojs.library.queensu.ca/index.php/affinities/article/view/6145

Wilson, David, and Andrew E. G. Jonas. “The People as Infrastructure Concept: Appraisal and New Directions.” *Urban Geography,* May 2021. https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2021.1931752

Nosengo, Nicola, et al., eds. *AI Models in the Global South.* Nature Collection, May 21, 2025. (Choose one article.) https://www.nature.com/collections/hjhebdigie

Bria, Francesca, Paul Timmers, and Fausto Gernone. *EuroStack – A European Alternative for Digital Sovereignty.* Bertelsmann Stiftung, February 2025. https://doi.org/10.11586/2025006

EXPLORE CASE STUDIES

OLMo (AI2): Ai2's fully open language-model project, releasing weights, training data, code, and evaluations. Advances research transparency while still relying on centralized compute. https://allenai.org/olmo

Socialism AI: A chatbot-style educational tool by the World Socialist Web Site that uses its archive to answer questions from a Marxist/Trotskyist perspective. https://www.wsws.org/en/special/pages/introducing-socialismai.html

AImpower.org: Works with people who stutter to make speech AI fairer, more accurate, and less stigmatizing, building community-led datasets and models. http://aimpower.org

GUEST SPEAKER Morshed Mannan

Morshed Mannan is a Lecturer in Global Law and Digital Technologies at Edinburgh Law School and ICDE Affiliate Faculty, whose research spans blockchain governance and cooperative governance, with a focus on democratizing the platform economy.

Week 11 · Thursday, November 5

Applying Cooperative Principles to AI Ethics

Building on Week 10's exploration of the cooperative digital stack, this session asks what it would concretely mean to apply the seven cooperative principles—first articulated in 1844—to the design, governance, and ethics of AI systems. Rather than treating cooperative values as abstract ideals, we examine how they can guide real-world alternatives to extractive, corporate-led tech development.

We begin with READ-COOP, the European cooperative behind the Transkribus handwriting recognition platform, which enables scholars, archivists, and communities to transcribe historical documents at scale while retaining democratic governance, equitable data policies, and a federated ownership model. We will engage directly with Professor Melissa Terras, one of READ-COOP's founding members, and Jose Mari Luzarraga Monasterio, co-founder of the Mondragon Team Academy.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

— How can the seven cooperative principles be concretely applied to the design, governance, and deployment of AI systems?

— What makes READ-COOP and Transkribus a viable model for ethical, democratically governed AI infrastructure?

— How can federated cooperative systems challenge extractive AI models and scale solidarity-based alternatives?

REQUIRED READINGS

Terras, Melissa, et al. “The Artificial Intelligence Cooperative: READ-COOP, Transkribus, and the Benefits of Shared Community Infrastructure for Automated Text Recognition.” *Open Research Europe* 5, no. 16 (2025): 1–44. https://open-research-europe.ec.europa.eu/articles/5-16

SUGGESTED READINGS

Tangen, Nicolai, Carine Smith Ihenacho, and Shilpi Nanda. “Why Employee Share Ownership Matters for Long-Term Value Creation.” Norges Bank Investment Management, 2026.

https://www.nbim.no/en/news-and-insights/our-views/2026/why-employee-share-ownership-matters-for-long-term-value-creation/

Srivastava, Lina. “Building Community Governance for AI.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review,* March 4, 2024.
https://ssir.org/articles/entry/ai-building-community-governance

Scholz, R. Trebor. “The Coming Data Democracy.” In *Own This! How Platform Cooperatives Help Workers Build a Democratic Internet.* Verso, 2023.

SUGGESTED VIDEO

Oxford Union. “THW End the Private Ownership of Social Media Companies | Full Debate.” YouTube, April 2026. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D14LaBUw0Cs

EXPLORE COOPERATIVE CASE STUDIES

Explore how cooperatives like LESTAC AI, FrieslandCampina, and Coop Sweden are building ethical, localized AI—from infrastructure and analytics to retail applications. Consider how each engages different layers of the AI stack and reflects cooperative principles in practice.

GUEST SPEAKER **Melissa Terras**

Melissa Terras is Professor of Digital Cultural Heritage at the University of Edinburgh and a founding director of READ-COOP, the cooperative behind Transkribus — an AI-powered platform for recognizing handwritten historical documents that she argues may be the only AI cooperative of its kind in existence.

Week 12 · Thursday, November 12

Bangkok Conference — No Class

No class this week.

Prof. Scholz will be at the Solidarity AI 2026 Conference, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok (November 12–15).

PART IV: MOVEMENT BUILDING (WEEKS 13–14)

Week 13 · Thursday, November 19

What Coops Are Already Doing

AI is reshaping economies, institutions, and everyday life—but its development remains tightly controlled by firms like OpenAI, Microsoft, and Meta. These companies dominate through massive infrastructure, extractive data practices, and profit-driven design, often reinforcing global inequality and ecological harm. This session asks: What alternatives are not just imaginable, but already underway?

We examine how cooperatives—and, more broadly, the solidarity economy—are beginning to intervene in AI's development. Cooperatives alone already employ nearly 10% of the global workforce and represent a global movement with real economic and political weight. Through case studies like IFFCO, FrieslandCampina, MIDATA, Pescadata, READ-COOP, and the Gamayyar African Tech Workers' Cooperative, we explore how these models are reclaiming AI for equity, sustainability, and collective ownership.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

— Where are cooperatives and solidarity economy actors already intervening in the AI space—and what is the scope and impact of their work?

— What structural or legal shifts would enable cooperatives to do more in shaping AI infrastructure, design, and governance?

— Beyond cooperatives, how might broader solidarity economy networks provide the resources, alliances, and scale needed to challenge corporate AI dominance?

REQUIRED READINGS

Scholz, T., and S. Tortorici. *Cooperative AI?* SSRN, 2025. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=6136454

SUGGESTED READINGS

Scholz, Trebor, and Stefano Tortorici. “5 Ways Cooperatives Can Shape the Future of AI.” *Harvard Business Review,* June 25, 2025. https://hbr.org/2025/06/5-ways-cooperatives-can-shape-the-future-of-ai

Hubbard, Sarah. “Cooperative Paradigms for Artificial Intelligence.” Ash Center, Harvard Kennedy School, November 20, 2024. https://ash.harvard.edu/resources/cooperative-paradigms-for-artificial-intelligence/

Free Knowledge Institute. “Cooperative Clouds: How LaSuite.coop Is Building a New Model for Digital Sovereignty.” https://freeknowledge.eu/cooperative-clouds-how-lasuitecoop-is-building-new-model-digital-sovereignty

Poliks, J., and S. Trillo. “Convergence.” *Carrier Bag,* May 21, 2026. https://carrier-bag.net/convergence/

REWE Group. “AI Manifesto.” Digital Day 2020, Cologne, Germany, 2020.

EXPLORE COOPERATIVE CASE STUDIES

Research MIDATA.coop, a Swiss health data cooperative that enables member-owned, consent-based data sharing for ethical AI development. Focus particularly on how MIDATA uses AI through AiDAVA, its virtual assistant that helps individuals curate, integrate, and manage their health records with human-in-the-loop support. https://midata.coop

GUEST SPEAKER TBD

November 26 THANKSGIVING. NO CLASS

Week 14 · Thursday, December 3
Movement Building

This session explores why cooperatives alone cannot meaningfully confront the systemic challenges of AI. They will not succeed if they act in isolation—or cling to the illusion of being apolitical. To make a

real impact, cooperatives must align with other movements fighting for justice in technology, labor, climate, and data governance.

We bring together tech-worker unions, climate justice networks, and Indigenous data-sovereignty campaigns to explore how cooperative strategies can amplify solidarity across struggles. The session investigates what cross-movement collaboration could look like in practice, and how shared principles—such as democratic governance, mutual aid, and collective ownership—can lay the groundwork for durable, people-centered alternatives to extractive AI systems.

Guiding Questions

— Why can't cooperatives alone confront the structural harms of AI—and what are the limits of working in isolation?

— What does meaningful cross-movement collaboration look like between co-ops, unions, climate activists, and Indigenous groups?

— How can shared governance, mutual aid, and collective ownership shape AI development beyond capitalist or state-centered models?

Required Readings:

Hunt-Hendrix, Leah, and Astra Taylor. "Solidarity Beyond Borders." In *Solidarity: The Past, Present, and Future of a World-Changing Idea*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2024.

Kawano, Emily, and Julie Matthaei. 2020. "System Change: A Basic Primer to the Solidarity Economy." Nonprofit Quarterly, July 8, 2020.

Suggested Reading:

Vieta, Marcelo, et al. 2010. "Editorial: The New Cooperativism." *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action* 4, no. 1 (August 25): 1–11.
https://nonprofitquarterly.org/system-change-a-basic-primer-to-the-solidarity-economy/

Week 15 · Thursday, December 10

What Stays With Us — Closing Circle and Collective Commitments

In this final class, we begin with a closing lecture and a reflection on the semester as a whole. We revisit the concepts that have stayed with us, examine a few sample papers, and return to the peer library to explore the texts and resources that you have recommended throughout the course.

Looking back on our 15-week learning journey, we reflect on the key insights, questions, and perspectives that emerged along the way. We conclude with a feedback session and an opportunity to express appreciation for one another's contributions, while considering the most important lessons we will carry forward beyond this class.

Participation and Certification

This course is non-graded and open to community participants from diverse backgrounds. To receive a certificate of completion, participants are expected to:

- *Attend at least 12 of the 15 live sessions.*
- Complete the required readings for each session.
- Actively participate in discussions, breakout groups, and collaborative activities.

There are no formal assignments or graded submissions. Participants are welcome to write reflections, draft manifestos, or engage in peer exchanges throughout the course.

Required Materials and Expenses

All required reading materials, including PDFs, and audio resources are provided free of charge. There are no costs associated with this course.

Academic Integrity Policy

The standards of academic integrity apply to all forms of academic work and circumstances, including presentations, examinations, submissions of papers, projects, and academic records. Academic integrity includes accurate use of quotations, as well as appropriate and explicit citation of sources in instances of paraphrasing and reporting on research findings.

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to: cheating on examinations; submitting another’s work as one’s own; unauthorized use of AI tools to generate ideas, images, art/design, audio, video, code, or text for any portions of work; and any attempt to gain academic advantage by presenting misleading information.

Title IX Policy

The New School is committed to creating and sustaining an environment where students, faculty, and staff can study, work, and thrive unhampered by discrimination or harassment. Community members affected by sexual harassment or any other form of sexual violence can seek assistance and education through the university's Title IX resources.

Acknowledgment

The generative AI policy reflects the instructor's own thinking and draws on course policies from the Harvard Kennedy School Executive Education program.

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